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# TEN • STORY SPORTS

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Volume 8

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Somehow, the team had to go it into their battered skulls,  
that the opposition were not all supermen.

# THE SAINTS GO STUMBLING ON

by JACK RITCHIE

**I**T TOOK a little time to pry the half a ton of football players off of Archie. He spit out a mouthful of grass and trotted back to the huddle. "I feel like a cow," he said. "Only not very contented."

Freddie Yates, the Saints' quarterback, took command of the circle. He wiped his smudged nose on his sleeve and looked thoughtfully at the Holleyville Tech line. "We don't seem to be doing so good going through them," he said sadly. "Let's go around them."

"We've tried that already," Archie reminded him. "Dozens of times."

"How about a pass?" Radke, the left guard, offered. "I'm tired of getting stepped on when you try running plays."

Freddie's solemn blue eyes surveyed the faces in front of him. "I suppose we might as well try throwing it, unless somebody else has another suggestion?"

The team advanced to the scrimmage line and Freddie counted off. He took the ball from the center and faded back. His line began leaking, leaking like a sieve and he retreated farther, searching vainly for a man in the clear.

The big bruisers of the Tech line came, tearing toward him and Freddie gulped. Taking one last reproachful glance at his well-covered receivers, he tucked the ball under his arm and made a valiant effort to run.

The first man to hit him nearly drove the football through his stomach and the next tried to tear his head off. Two more gleeful linemen finished the job of nailing him to the ground.

Archie Williams helped him to his feet. "Looks like we're beginning to hold our own," he said wryly; "we haven't fumbled, and we lost only twelve yards."

Freddie's eyes were glazed and he staggered a bit. "At least we can say they didn't intercept the ball."

Archie regarded him with concern. "You sure you're all right?" He peered into Freddie's eyes. "What day of the week is this?"

Freddie blinked. "Saturday."

"And what's the score?"

"49 to 0." Freddie was now in the groove. "My name is Fred L. Yates and I have a room at Elton Hall. That's right, isn't it?"

"Sure," said Archie, patting him on the shoulder. "Just the same, I think



you've had enough for today." He called for time and had a substitute sent in.

**A**RCHIE WILLIAMS glanced at the stadium clock and noticed with relief that only a little more time remained in the game.

Resignedly the team crouched for the next play. They were on their own twelve, third down, and twenty-six to go for a first down.

The new quarterback handed the ball off to Bronson, the left half, and let him try the outside. He got almost to the line of scrimmage before he was dumped.

Bronson groaned his way to his feet. "It's funny how tired you get when you're losing," he said.

"Oh, Lord," Radke sighed. "Now we've got to kick and chase those guys up and down the field. Why don't we have a two platoon system this year?"

The Saints lined up in punt formation and Archie dropped back for the kick. He barely managed to get it away before he was smothered.

It came down to Jensen, the Tech scat back, who was waiting for it on the Saints' forty-two. He scampered along behind good blocking all the

way to the seven before he could be brought down.

With the clock ticking off the final seconds, the Tech aerial specialist flipped a pass into the end zone where Radke deflected it into the arms of the intended receiver.

That hiked the score to 55 to 0, and the Tech partisans cheered rather hoarsely.

Some of the Saints' Coeds began dutifully chanting, "Block that kick! Block that kick!"

Archie looked pained and then shrugged his shoulders. "They may not know much about football, but at least they're loyal."

The pass from center was bad and Radke managed to slip through and block the kick with his face as the gun sounded.

"You know," he said, trying to uncross his eyes. "A thing like this makes up for the whole afternoon; maybe I'll get my name in the paper."

Dr. Prescott, football coach, athletic director, and professor of Economics, watched his boys shamble off the field. He turned to the Dean of Men standing beside him. "Well, that's over. It could have been worse."

The Dean stared morosely at the field. "How much worse is something wonderful to speculate about. Don't forget to congratulate the boy with blood on his face; he saved the game from being a real rout."

Dr. Prescott filled his pipe and applied a match. Between puffs, he said, "We ought to do better next week. Farwell A. & M. hasn't won a game this season."

The Dean turned up his overcoat collar and prepared to depart. "And we haven't won one in three years. It ought to be a real battle. Well, see you tomorrow night."

**A**FTER THE Dean had gone, Dr. Prescott ambled down to the dressing room. The boys were tired

and they waited patiently, scattered about the floor.

"Men," he said. "You played a fine game and I'm proud of you." Dr. Prescott barely suppressed his grin. "It's too bad we had to lose, but that's the way the ball rolls."

"Never you mind, men," said Freddie, taking off a shoe. "It's how you play the game that counts, not whether you win."

"Please!" Dr. Prescott admonished him. "You're making me lose my place. Now, where was I?"

"You were going to tell us we're good losers," Bronson prompted him.

Radke touched his nose gingerly and winced. "Honestly," he complained. "Sometimes I think you fellows just don't care."

"Anyway," Dr. Prescott resumed. "You did the best you could and that's all we can ask of you. Now take your showers like good little souls and have a nice Sunday."

Freddie Yates and Bronson went home for what was left of the weekend and tried to explain to their fathers why the laurels of St. Peter's Liberal Arts College were so withered. Radke stayed in the dormitory and soaked his nose.

Archie Williams conscientiously did his class assignments all day Sunday, and in the evening he treated Ellen O'Brien to a movie.

Ellen O'Brien's hair was pitch-black and her complexion a smooth cream. These and various other gifts of nature were steadily undermining Archie's resistance.

It was a losing battle, Archie knew, but he enjoyed being defeated in this case. He knew that some night when her perfume was particularly compelling he'd ask the fatal question. The idea still made him nervous.

After the show they walked along the quiet streets. Archie was silent and deep in dark thought. Ellen accepted his mood for a while, then she

said, "What are you thinking about?"

They walked a little further before he answered. "I'm just wondering why we can't win a game."

She patted his arm affectionately. "It really doesn't matter, as long as you're healthy."

"I've been on the team three years, and for what?" he muttered miserably. "I'm the lowest scoring back in the conference. 'Course," he admitted, not wanting to share the honor alone. "I'm tied with Bronson on that."

"You're much better looking than Bronson," she consoled him.

"I don't care for myself," he continued. "But how will I explain it to my children when they're old enough to ask questions."

Ellen got interested. "You'll never have any if you don't propose soon to some nice girl with raven locks and who's a good cook, a wonderful homemaker, and devastatingly beautiful to boot."

Archie frowned at her. "If you don't behave, I'll put you at the bottom of my list. As it is, I'm not so sure that I don't prefer blondes in the first place."

IN THE BIG house at the end of Faculty Road, Dr. Prescott and the Dean were having an intermission Tom Collins in the doctor's study. In a few minutes they would have to rejoin their wives for another round of Canasta.

The Dean accepted his drink. "I received a suggestion that might help you with your team. Got it from White in the Literature Department."

Dr. Prescott took a preliminary sip from his glass and seemed satisfied. "It'll have to be one pip of a suggestion," he said.

"This fellow White called my attention to the story of Lysistrata."

Dr. Prescott, whose field was quite definitely Economics, said, "Lysistrata?"

"That's right," the dean nodded. "A

comedy by Aristophanes. Seems as how these Greek boys were spending all their time running off to fight wars. The women of the city, being left alone so much, didn't like it a bit."

The Dean's specialty was physics. He went on. "So they, meaning the women, organized for collective action. The next time their men came trooping home from the wars, the women withheld their, ah... favors in the effort to get the men to promise not to leave again."

"Hm," said Dr. Prescott, considering. "You mean sort of reverse the thing for our football team and have the girls not...?" He stopped suddenly. "Good heavens, you don't mean that the girls *have* been...!"

"No, no," said the Dean hastily. "Withhold dates to dances and that kind of thing."

Dr. Prescott took a healthy swallow of his drink and thought about the idea. "I'm afraid it won't work," he said, finally. "We couldn't organize all of the girls. We've got two coeds to every male in the school; I'm afraid some couldn't withstand the temptation of turning into strikebreakers."

Reluctantly, the Dean was forced to agree. "Well, it might have been interesting. I just thought I'd mention it. It was White's idea."

They finished their drinks. "Say," said Dr. Prescott, struck with a pleasant notion. "This White seems like an intelligent chap. Have you asked him if he'd like to take over my job?"

The Dean nodded his head affirmatively. "I did, but he refused flatly. I'm afraid you're stuck with it, Prescott."

Dr. Prescott shrugged his shoulders. They rose and went to the door to the living room.

"By the way," said Dr. Prescott. "Did it work? That Lysistrata thing."

The Dean searched his memory for a few seconds. "I don't remember," he

said. "I'll have to ask White the next time I see him."

**A**FTER SUPPER Monday evening, Freddie Yates and Bronson drifted over to Archie's room. Freddie brought a big book with him and sat down on Archie's bed.

"I was talking to my father yesterday," he said.

"You're lucky," Bronson said. "Mine wouldn't say a word to me."

Freddie stared solemnly at his book. "He's got the idea that what our team needs is more determination."

"Have you ever been sneered at by a twelve-year old kid brother," Bronson demanded of the room.

Freddie opened the volume to the title page. "My father gave me this book and told me to read it; I'm on chapter three now and I think the author's got something."

Archie put down the pencil he had been writing with. "I've been figuring out some trick plays. That's what we need. Trick plays and more laterals."

Radke wandered in and straddled a chair.

Freddie wet a finger and turned a page. "The name of this book is 'Determination and the Will to Succeed' by J. B. Iverson."

"Of course, with these trick plays, the idea is not to fumble as much as we do." Archie bit the end of his pencil and proceeded to think.

"All the man's wrote about so far is selling insurance, but I get the idea. Determination!" Freddie said significantly.

Radke took out a package of chewing gum and offered it around. "My girl won't go out with me," he said; "I think there's another man."

Bronson selected a stick and began unwrapping it. "My mother talked to me, though," he said. "She said it didn't matter about our losing, as long as we're healthy." He frowned. "I

don't see what my sister's got to gripe about. She doesn't even understand football."

"I think that if we all got determined, we could take Saturday's game." Freddie indicated the book. "Everything we need is in here."

Radke was brooding. "Do any of you guys know somebody on the campus named Les Sistrata?" he said.

**W**HEN TUESDAY'S afternoon practice was fifteen minutes old, Dr. Prescott blew his whistle. He stood on a bench and the team gathered around. "Men," he said. "This week we play Farwell A. & M., as you all know." He looked at the faces in front of him. "Our whole season is pointed toward this game. It's the one we've got to win. Farwell is our deadly rival." He hesitated and turned to the trainer.

"Farwell is our deadly rival, isn't it?"

The trainer scratched his gray head. "I think so," he said. "Or maybe it's Hopkins."

"Anyway," said Dr. Prescott, resuming. "We've got to take this one if we don't take another game all season. Which seems likely. This game is our homecoming game."

The team seemed to grasp the urgency of the situation and a scowl of determination stole over Freddie's face.

"I want you passers to snap that ball, and you blockers to throw your weight into every block, and you runners to...well...run. Until Saturday's game is over, I want you to live football, eat football, and sleep football. Are there any questions?"

"Yeah," said Radke. "Why do they call it the homecoming game when we ain't been anywhere?"

Dr. Prescott glared at Radke until the latter looked uncomfortably at his shoes.

"Now until Saturday," the doctor went on, "we've got a lot of work to

do. Is there any particular thing that any of you think we should emphasize for the coming game?"

"I think we could use some new plays," Archie said. "I've worked out a half a dozen beauties."

Dr. Prescott seemed dubious, but he said, "Well, you can show them to me after practice. Is there anything else we should stress?"

Radke looked up. "I think we should stress fundamentals," he said; "that's always good for a couple of hours."

The homecoming parade was surprisingly enthusiastic, considering the team's standing. In the evening a large bonfire was lit on the campus and the cheerleaders performed acrobatics to whip up even more response.

Ellen and Archie, on the outskirts of the crowd, watched as the students began doing Indian dances around the flames.

"Dr. Prescott said I had the makings of a real play maker," Archie said. "There were just a few minor things wrong with the ones I figured out." His face grew perplexed. "I still can't figure out why I thought there were twelve men on a team."

Ellen snuggled closer for warmth. "My father's dreadfully disappointed in me. He's been sending me to college for three years now, and all I've got to show for it is an education."

"We couldn't have used them anyway," Archie said. "It's too late in the week to learn a lot of complicated plays."

Ellen rubbed her face against Archie's sweater. "My mother was married at eighteen, and here I am approaching twenty-one. I feel like a failure."

**FREDDIE YATES** came strolling along the grass with Tessie West hanging onto one arm. Under the other he carried his book.

They drew up alongside and Tessie pointed to the book. "Freddie's studying by firelight, just like Lincoln."

Ellen grinned at her. "How is the campaign coming?"

Tessie gazed fondly at Freddie. "It's hard when you've got to compete with football, but I'll fight along this line if it takes me all season. He won't get away."

Freddie watched the giant flames with concentration. "I'm up to chapter seven now," he said. "Great stuff."

Bronson and Radke wandered along and stopped. Radke had a bandage around the index finger of his right hand.

Bronson took Radke's hand and held it up for inspection. "He was throwing wood on the fire and he got too close," he explained.

A dreamy expression was on Freddie's face. "You know," he said thoughtfully, "this insurance field seems to be wide open; a man with determination could make a big thing of it."

Radke was glum. After a while, he said, "I think I'll look for my girl. If she's with that guy Les, we're through."

On a rise a hundred yards away, the Dean and Dr. Prescott watched the ceremonies with indulgence. They puffed contentedly on their pipes.

"They all seem to be pretty enthusiastic," the doctor observed.

"I guess they have to be," the Dean said. "It gets kind of chilly when you stand around doing nothing."

The cheer leaders started a Conga line.

"I suppose this is really a pagan rite of some kind with deep significance," Dr. Prescott said.

The Dean grunted. "I've given up trying to understand these things long ago."

"There's something I've been meaning to ask you about the game tomorrow," Dr. Prescott said. "Why do they call it the homecoming game when we ain't...haven't been anywhere?"

The Dean knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "I don't know," he said.



"I'll ask White tomorrow. He seems to know everything."

**T**HE AFTERNOON of the game came bright and sunny with the temperature in the crisp forties. The stadium was filled more than usual with St. Peter students and alumni hungry for a victory.

The St. Peter Saints won the toss and elected to receive. The Farwell Aggies had to be satisfied with having the wind at their backs.

The kickoff was a high one that came down to Bronson on the four. He gathered it in and side-stepped the first tackler coming down. Then, behind blocking, he made his way to the thirty.

When his blockers were no longer effective, he reversed his field. He outran two Aggies and it was only the last man between him and the goal who brought him down on the Farwell twenty-six.

The Saints entered the first huddle agreeably surprised and optimistic.

"Twenty-four plus forty-six is an even seventy yards," Bronson's expression was happy. "Not a bad return; that ties the best Dad has ever done."

On first down, Archie took the ball around right end for nine yards to the seventeen. The fullback bucked through for the first down to the twelve.

The next play fouled up when Archie missed the signals. But Freddie, forced to keep the ball, knifed between two incoming linemen and took the pigskin down to the two yard line.

The chain gang came in from the side lines and confirmed the fact that the Saints had another first down.

"Did you notice that?" Freddie said. "I kept my head and took advantage of the breaks; that's in chapter four."

With two yards to go for the touch-down, Freddie took the ball on a

quarterback sneak. He was met on the one yard line by the center and right guard who picked him up and bounced him solidly to the ground.

In the momentary period when Freddie saw nothing but bright colors, his grasp on the ball slackened and he left it roll away.

The Aggie quarterback, with a whoop of joy, pounced on the fumble two feet from the goal line.

"Well," said Freddie, when he became aware of the situation. "The game's only begun. And besides, we got them inside their one-yard line."

Archie and Bronson dropped back for the expected boot, but the Aggie quarterback elected to carry the ball. He took it all the way to the thirty-five before Archie got hold of his ankle and dragged him down.

The Aggie team seemed to be inspired and in a series of seven plays brought the ball deep into Saint territory on the twelve. And then, trying to make a yard for another first down, their quarterback fumbled and Freddie fell on the ball.

"Tit for tat," he said exuberantly.

For the rest of the quarter, the teams surged up and down the field, making long gains but bogging down when they neared pay dirt.

**A**FTER CHANGING goals beginning the second quarter, Archie took a hand-off and scampered sixty yards to the Farwell twenty-one. The hard tackle that brought him down knocked him colder than an ice cube.

The officials pried the ball from his unconscious grip and called for a stretcher to carry him off the field.

A hasty examination by the team doctor revealed nothing radically wrong and smelling salts were administered. Archie sat up groggily amid the solicitude of the substitutes. "Where's Ellen," he said. "She was here a minute ago and I'm afraid I proposed."



A few whiffs of oxygen brought him all the way back.

On the field the Aggies had the ball again. Their quarterback, seemingly obsessed with the idea of carrying the mail himself, tried going through the line three times in succession.

Freddie, backing up the line, brought him down each time. They became well acquainted and exchanged some pleasant words.

On fourth down, the Aggie kicking specialist punted a towering one to Bronson. He took it on the run and was off on a wide sweep along the side lines. He carried it fifty yards to the Farwell eight before he was knocked out of bounds.

Once again the Saints ran up against a stone wall, losing eleven yards on three plays. Their fourth down field goal attempt went wide.

When the half ended, the score was still nothing to nothing, and the teams jogged off the field.

Down in the dressing room, Dr. Prescott let his boys get settled and then went over their play, point by point.

With that business out of the way, he cleared his throat, glanced surreptitiously at his notes, and launched into his pep talk.

"I was mighty proud of you boys out there," he said. "I think you discovered that they put on their pants one leg at a time, just like you do. They're no supermen."

Dr. Prescott called to mind all the football movies he had seen. He slammed his fist hard into his palm and winced. "When you get out there for the second half, remember that the whole school is watching you. Your girls are out there! Your families are out there!"

Bronson eagerly nodded his head in agreement.

"But that isn't all," the doctor went on. "Every man who's ever worn the

uniform of St. Peter is out there, if not in body, at least in spirit."

Dr. Prescott heard himself with considerable satisfaction. "I want you to play clean," he roared, "but I want you to play hard. I want you to tackle and slam your man down. And when he's down, don't let him just lie there. Stamp on him!"

The doctor swung his arm toward the door. "Now get out there and fight! Fight!"

The team jumped to its feet cheering and poured through the exit. Radke, tearing after them, stumbled over a bench and fell flat on his face.

**T**HE REVITALIZED St. Peter Saints kicked off to the revitalized Aggies to begin the second half. The Aggie quarterback, with a look of inhuman determination on his face, took the kick and thundered down the field.

Freddie Yates growled, brushed aside two blockers and brought him down on the Aggie twenty-two.

The Farwell team tried to go through the center of the line once and around right end twice without much success. On fourth down the Aggies were forced to kick.

The punt was a tremendous one that sent Bronson deep into his own territory. He took it over his shoulder, going away, and by the time he had his speed under control and could turn around he was on his own five.

Stiff-arming the closest man, he began a long and weird trek that took him from side line to side line. He darted through holes, followed blockers, reversed field several times, and swivel-hipped his way down the field.

It looked as if he was going all the way, but he tired and the speedy Aggie right-half back caught up with him and dragged him down on the Farwell five.

Bronson was panting when he joined the huddle. "Ninety yards," he said

gasping for breath. "That's twenty more yards than Dad ever made when he was playing." He managed a smile. "I think that ought to satisfy the whole doggone family, even if I didn't score."

With first down and five to go, Freddie lateraled the ball to Archie, who tried going around right end. He got to the line of scrimmage, but that was all.

Bronson, somewhat rested, attempted bucking through the line on the next play, but unfortunately ran into Radke and lost a yard. On third down, Freddie set his jaw and tried to act like a full back crashing the line. He was smashed to the turf after getting to the two yard mark.

Freddie had the momentary temptation to call for a field goal, but he decided to try for the big one.

He gave the football to Bronson on fourth down. Bronson tried squeezing through the tackle spot. He was stopped standing inches from the goal line.

While the Aggies were huddling, Radke said, "I went to the Registrar's office today. There isn't anybody on the campus named Sistrata."

The Aggies came into position and kicked the ball out of danger.

Play continued through the third quarter and the Aggies threatened several times, once getting to the Saints four. However they could never sustain enough drive to change the score board.

**I**N THE FOURTH quarter, Freddie Yates made the acquaintance of the tackling Farwell quarterback several more times.

Freddie came to the huddle looking bewildered. "I just found out that that guy's been reading my book," he said with resentment.

The clock ticked off the playing time and with eight minutes to go, the Aggies called for time. The Saints

sprawled on the ground thankful for the respite.

Radke chewed on a piece of grass. "I think she's just trying to make me jealous," he said.

Freddie was looking a bit more cheerful. "We still got a chance," he said. "That guy's only up to chapter seven; I finished eight last night."

Under the driving influence of the Aggie quarterback, the Farwell team resumed play with something akin to desperation. They ground together a string of first downs, but again within the shadow of the goal posts, they faltered.

Their fourth down pass fell harmlessly in the end zone.

Only two minutes remained to play when the Saints took over on their own twenty.

Freddie Yates tried to find his ends with three long passes, but he overled every time. With the clock moving remorselessly into the final minute, Freddie elected to gamble on fourth down.

He tossed a short pass over the heads of the onrushing linemen. Archie grabbed the ball, and out-maneuvering the left end, he began sprinting down the field.

He felt a surge of exultation. There was no one in front of him but the safety man, and even he wasn't going to have a clear shot at Archie.

Archie could see it was going to be a race and he headed for the side lines. He could almost feel the grasp of the frantic tackler as he dove at Archie and missed!

His legs digging into the sod, Archie dashed down the edge of the field and into the end zone.

He tossed the ball into the air and whooped for joy. He could almost swear he could distinguish Ellen's voice cheering from the stands.

Archie turned around to accept the congratulations of his teammates. His

face fell when he noticed that they were all gathered around the referees and umpires giving them an argument.

He trotted back down the field. "What in the world's the matter?" he demanded.

Radke scratched his nose and avoided Archie's eyes. "Your touchdown don't count," he said. "I was off-side."

**T**HE AGGIES quite naturally took the penalty rather than the down. Freddie tried one more pass, but it was incomplete. The Farwell team took over on the Saints' twenty with less than fifteen seconds to play.

With vestiges of hope still shining in their eyes, the Aggies advanced to the line. The quarterback took the ball and faded back for the toss into the end zone.

The Saint line broke through, rushing the passer. With an expression of despair he cocked his arm and attempted to throw the pigskin.

The Saint left end, leaping into the air, managed to get a few fingers on the ball, deflecting it to the right.

It twisted through the air and came down into the arms of a surprised Radke. He regarded the ball in his hands with a mixture of horror and repugnance.

Being a guard, he didn't quite know what to do with it now that he had it. But when he saw the tacklers rushing toward him, he quickly got the idea.

His eyes widened and he began galloping towards the Aggie goal. Radke wasn't fast, usually, but the pounding feet of his pursuers gave him a magic new speed.

He might have been overtaken at the Farwell twenty-five, but just then the gun sounded the end of the game.

The sound of the shot acted like a prod that drew the very last ounce of speed out of his legs. He crossed

the goal line pulling away from the Farwell men chasing him.

As he stopped in the end zone, the thought of what he had done slowly penetrated his fright. And when his teammates pounded his back, nearly felling him, he came out of his daze and started to be happy.

The fact that the point after the touchdown was missed was unimportant. What was important was that St. Peter's College had finally won a game.

The stadium emptied onto the field and large mobs began rocking the goal posts, both of them for good measure.

Standing on a bench amid the pandemonium, Dr. Prescott regarded the favorite pipe he had broken during Radke's run.

The Dean pushed his way through the crowd and climbed next to the doctor.

"White came to me this morning," the Dean shouted in his ear. "He's been thinking over that proposition about taking over your job. He's got some theories he wants to work out."

Dr. Prescott became angry and he threw away the pieces of his pipe. "Over my dead body," he yelled. He tapped his chest violently. "I'm running this team."

The goal posts disappeared and now most of the team was being carried on the shoulders of the students. The mob gradually formed into a parade with the band leading.

It headed for the gates, but was forced to halt momentarily when Radke fell off the shoulders of the men carrying him and had to be picked up again.

The Dean grinned and took a deep breath of the tonic-like air. "Wonder how we'll do next week," he said. "Personally, I think we'll slaughter them."

